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A LETTER
TO
JOHN MURRAY, Esq.



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A LETTER
TO
JOHN MURRAY, Esq.,
UPON AN
ÆSTHETIC-EDITION
OF THE
WORKS OF SHAKSPEARE,
BY
SPENCER HALL,
Librarian to the Athenæum.

Διοιγομένους δὲ ἰδὼν ἂν τις, καὶ ἐντὸς αὐτῶν γιγνόμενος πρῶτον μὲν νοῦν ἔχοντας
ἐνδον μόνους εὐρήσει των λόγων, ἔπειτα θειοτάτους, καὶ πλείστ' ἀγάλματ' ἀρετῆς
ἐν αὐτοῖς ἔχοντας, καὶ ἐπὶ πλείστον τείνοντας, μᾶλλον δὲ ἐπὶ πᾶν ὅσον προσήκει
σκοπεῖν τῷ μέλλοντι καλῶ κἀγαθῶ ἔσσεσθαι.

“But he who beholds his discourses when opened, and penetrates into their depth, will, in the first place, find that they alone of all other discourses contain intellect within them; and, in the next place, that they are most divine, are replete with numerous images of virtue, and have a very ample extent, or rather extend themselves to everything which it is fit he should consider who intends to become a truly worthy man.”—PLATO. *The Banquet.*

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A LETTER, &c.

SIR,

THE reputation which you so justly have acquired by the publication of many valuable works, and your consequent connection with those, by whom our literature has been enriched, induce me to address you upon a subject not deficient, as I believe, in interest; however imperfect the light in which it is seen, or unequal the ability by which it is considered. The works of great minds, as those of Shakspeare and Milton, are part of the property of a nation; every educated man must feel that what they have produced is to be considered as a precious legacy, by the due use of which genius is instructed, and taste refined; by which the mind becomes enlarged, endowed with purer sympathies, is made more capable of estimating what is excellent, and induced to habits of thought most conducive to happiness; by increasing the motives for mental exertion, and by promoting that civilization of opinion which arises from the intellectual communion of mankind. "Time glides by; fortune is inconstant; tempers are soured; bonds which seemed indissoluble, are daily sundered by interest, by emulation, or by caprice. But no such cause can affect the silent converse which we hold with the highest of human intellects. The debt which the man of liberal education owes to them is incalculable; they have guided him to truth; they have filled his mind with graceful images; they have stood by him in all vicissitudes, comforters in sorrow, nurses in sickness, companions in solitude." For their works are as eternal springs, from whence those waters well, which flow to nourish, and to cultivate, the purest feelings of the heart.

If this be true, the mode and manner of their reproduction should never be a matter of indifference, a matter of chance;

See Res Baldwin, 12 Mar. 52 Howes

they should not be held as the mere mediums of commercial exchange; nor should we consent that Shakspeare or Milton should be published, as

The Shakspeares and the Miltons of a Curll.

The works of every author should exhibit, at every successive period, the estimation of the time; for though from the date of the first critic upon Homer, to the days of Heyne, every variety of opinion has been expressed; yet much of error has been confuted, much of truth ascertained. History has been elicited from the impurities of popular tradition, local customs have been explained, and criticism, as it has advanced, has given additional interest to the author, by making his works the gradual exhibition of the progress of the human mind. As a nation becomes civilized, it exacts more excellence in an author; and a more rigid examination of the opinions of those, by whose decisions his merits have been allowed. Thus the author and the critic are alike considered the merits of Shakspeare or Johnson, though distinct, are blended; and we consider them not only with reference to their period, but to the genius and knowledge of our own.

There is no better test of the state of public education, of the purity of general taste, or of the tendency of opinion, than the character of national literature, and the estimation in which its classics are held. The casual neglect of the writings of eminent men may depend upon obsolescence of language, change of manners, variations of taste, violence of faction, or advancement of scientific truth; but constant indifference is the result of general debasement, of ignorance in the people—want of refinement in their rulers.

The only remedy for indifference, and the best means for the maintenance of a pure taste, is so to edit an author, as to produce an abiding and just appreciation of his merits upon the public mind; and so to produce his works as to place them within the means of the greater portion of the educated classes, whose opinions are invariably reflected, and become common rules, which we receive with respect, due alike to those who enounce them, and the sources from whence they are drawn.

Now I propose to consider these questions with reference to Shakspeare.

Do we possess a good critical edition of his works?

Is it one of general and easy acquisition?

That an author may be thoroughly understood, he must be studied in the light and shade of his own time; we must consider him both with regard to his mental and moral powers, their exercise or neglect; observe to what impressions he was subject; his influence on his contemporaries; and compare him, as respects his acquirements, both by the knowledge of his era and his means of acquisition. And as all excellence is comparative, he, in relation to others, must be considered not only with reference to the creative power, but its mechanical exercise; not only as to thought, but as to the force and elegance of its expression. In Dramatic Literature, this excellence will be in part evinced by the connection of its characters and events with real life; not such characters as the world has never known, but such as have deserved its fame; the Historic Drama:—or the delineation of such passions, inherent in human nature, as in general enliven, discourage, or intersect our progress amid the varied objects, pursuits, interests, and ambitions of our fellow-men; the Domestic Drama.

The Drama is historical, if its basis, progress, incidents, form and impression, be as such synthetically true. Analytical truth, as an essential and pervading character, is not required. It is a natural, but not necessarily, a determined feature. A requisition of rigid exactness in every component part would be the requisition of a chronologist, of one who reduces history, from a moral science, to a mere “Companion to the Almanac,” compiles it as a collection of facts—an Annual Diary, written in the arid dialect of meagre recollection.

The Domestic Drama has in general a distinct moral aim, it is a picture of human destiny, a sketch from the ideal world reduced to the experience of common life. In the hands of a poet, possessed of graphic powers of description, skill in arrangement, and knowledge of human nature, it becomes a truly affecting portraiture of the delusions of passion, or the

influence of the moral sense ; but of later plays the characters are too artificial, the satire too much allied to caricature, and the sentiment too morbid or sickly, to permit them to possess, or to retain, either a truly moral or poetical impression. In fine, the representation of the passions and emotions of the mind becomes the POETRY, and their just representation the ART, of Dramatic writing.

It is the duty of the moralist to analyse the mind and the moral sense, and to test the accuracy of our perceptions by their connection with natural or revealed truth. It is the province of the poet to study the affections, to survey nature, to open fresh sources of pleasure by new variations of incident, by placing common circumstances in an altered or improved light, by producing combinations of character, and by adding to the beauty of truth, the charms of diction.

But as there is always danger where the mind can escape from the past to the present, or does not sufficiently grasp the passion or circumstance the poet embodies, that his power over our feelings may diminish ; it is the object of criticism to fix attention ; to explain what time has rendered obscure, and ignorance has weakened ; and “to spread such flowers over the regions through which intelligence has already made its progress, as may tempt it to return, and take a second view of things hastily passed over, or negligently regarded.”

Shakspeare, who by reason of his surpassing powers cannot be compared, is yet to be *studied* with reference to his precursors and contemporaries ; he is to be known only, in so far as he can be known, “in a reflex image, from the objectivity in which he was manifested, which may be Othello, Hamlet, or Falstaff,” names in his hands, types of particular character, but no less indicative of the subjective structure of his own. Hitherto he has had commentators rather than critics. “I have hardly,” says Schlegel, “ever found either truth or profundity in their observations and they seem to me but stammering interpreters of the general, and almost idolatrous admiration of his countrymen.” This may be true ; and is susceptible of explanation. The editions we possess represent *the wants of the period*. “Stat sua cuique dies.” In the editions of all authors

our first aim is *correctness of text*. Illustration and paraphrase soon succeed ; for an author not unfrequently becomes obscure as we advance from his era, and our knowledge of it becomes uncertain ; these supplied, attention varies, and is more definitely fixed upon the poet, *i. e.*, it becomes the *criticism of his mind*.

Now it is impossible to exaggerate the disgraceful state of the text of Shakspeare, upon its first publication. Shakspeare sold his plays not to be printed, but to be played. They were copied for actors, and multiplied by transcript ; vitiated by the penman, and changed for the player, sometimes enlarged, sometimes curtailed ; printed without his concurrence, or the proprietor's consent, from compilations from the prompter's book, and the actor's parts. This arose not from negligence of his ; for it is probable he had no control, after their first disposal. But the copyright of plays was, in his day, so imperfectly understood, that the only security against its invasion was their non-publication, by reserving them in MSS. for the use of the theatre to which they had been assigned. This custom is still perhaps not uncommon in other countries. In 1752 the Venetian Director Medebach, for whose company many of Goldoni's comedies were composed, claimed an exclusive right to their property. This appears from the Memoir of his Life.--“ Non corrispondendo per altro alle fatiche gli emolumenti, pensò ad aumentare questi ultimi col mettere alle stampe l'opere sue, che gli furono da alcuni richieste, e da molti gli parvero desiderate. Trovò egli per altro della resistenza nel direttore della compagnia per l'esecuzione del suo piano, sul fondamento che le produzioni fatte per il Teatro di S. Angelo gli appartenessero per diritto, e che l'autore ne avesse perduta la proprietà.”

And the abuse arising from this long existing want of adequate protection for dramatic property was so great, that “ Henslowe was glad at times to stay the printer with a present of forty shillings to preserve his right ; and in 1637, the system of pirating from the playhouse had grown to such an extent, that the players memorialized the Lord Chamberlain to restrain some of the company of printers and stationers from

printing divers of their books of comedies and tragedies, which they had for their own use bought at high prices, and which the printers were for publishing to the prejudice of the players, and from the corrupt state in which they were printed to the injury they add, and disgrace of the authors."

Thus from the period of the first publication of Shakspeare's works, 1623, to that of Rowe, 1709, and from him to Malone, this evil of a corrupt text had been felt; to ascertain, explain, and settle it was the object of every editor;

————— Of business the directing soul
To this our head, like bias to the bowl;

which will be, I trust, made the more apparent from the following account. The folio editions bear the following dates: 1623, 1632, 1664, 1685. The first did not appear until seven years after his death, and the long intervals occurring between each, have tended to create a suspicion as to Shakspeare's popularity; for there is no reason to suppose many copies were printed—and the statement of the destruction of the third by the Fire of London is, I believe, doubtful. The rarity of any work of that period is, in general, very liberally attributed to the flames. Would it not have the charm of novelty, be as true, and equally useful to assert—they have died of the plague? The morality of limiting our assertions to what *we know*, is surely now only maintained by the government and customs of Laputa. Shirley complained that he did not "draw good houses."

————— You see
What audience we have: *what company*
To Shakspeare comes! whose mirth did once beguile
Dull hours,
He has but few friends lately.

And it should seem that no edition of his works appeared between 1685, and Rowe's in 1709; which tends to confirm the suspicion, that he had fallen upon evil days. I will attempt a slight account of its cause. The fame of Marlowe, Peele, Greene, Lily, &c., the founders of the English drama, was long established. Marlowe was the first who made any impression upon the hearts of his audience. Their admiration of him was divided with Peele and Greene. Wood says, the plays of Peele were often acted after his death; it is probable the

others were as popular. Shakspeare was beginning to blaze upon the world about the close of their career. His contemporaries and successors were Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher; Massinger, Ford, and Shirley; Nabbes and Marmion, and others of the same class, had probably each a successive influence upon the stage. Thus if the rivalry of many, may be thought to have any influence upon the popularity of one, however transcendant his genius, here were authors enough to encourage the eternal fickleness of the people. It is in vain to urge the claims of genius, when merit is centred in novelty. If in France the Goddess of Novelty, instead of the Goddess of Reason, had received republican honours, her statue would never have been taken down.

Verleg' sie sich auf Neuigkeiten!
Nur Neuigkeiten ziehn uns an.

There were also other causes. The stage, patronised by Elizabeth, James, and Charles, was yet subject to a strenuous opposition. This arose, first, from the spirit of theological controversy awakened by the Reformation; and the gloomy ignorance of the Puritans, which sicklied o'er with the pale cast of evil thought every effort of the Drama. But this was not exclusively a religious feeling. The theatre was not suppressed solely because "Stage plaies do not suit with seasons of humiliation, but fasting and prayer have been found very effectual." It had a political and a personal motive. The Puritans had been ridiculed, their edition of the *Philosophy of Kant* had been scurrilously used, and the destruction of the theatre was in part the result of an ancient quarrel between that party and the *corps dramatique*. It is another illustration of the chain of little consequences, which no one wisely neglects. Alexander Brome, in his verses on Richard Brome's comedies, declares the secret motive.

——— 'Tis worth our note
Bishops and *Players*, both suffered in one vote;
And reason good, for they had cause to fear them;
One did suppress their schisms, and t'other *jeer them* *.

* In confirmation of this, see Ben Jonson's "Bartholomew Fair," the character of Zeal-of-the-Land, Busy, and D'Urfey's lines.—*Gifford's Edition*, vol. iv., page 535.

The plays which had been written for the last sixty years prior to 1647 were therefore censured as inculcating the Doctrines of "Passive Obedience," and of "Non-Resistance;" of the "Sacredness of Kings," and of "Divine Right." They represented, it was said, loyalty as the first of virtues, and the chief duty of a citizen; rebellion neither warranted by circumstances, nor justified by the event.

————— If I could find example
Of thousands, who had struck anointed kings,
And flourished after, I'd not do it;—but since
Nor brass, nor stone, nor parchment, bears not one,
Let villainy itself forswear it.

They thought it should seem—

Such plays alone should claim a British ear,
As Cato's self had not disdained to hear.

In fact, which give elevation to the animus of those who believe themselves Catos, or who assume the names of great men, from some fancied identity of mind and cause. "D'abord, mon fils, je ne sais pas pourquoi tu t'ostines à m'appeler mère Gueuleton puisque je t'ai dit cent fois que je m'étais fait la mère des *Craques*... la fameuse Corneille qui a engendré *Gratecus*!" When a character of Paul de Kock thus expresses herself, we feel it to be a true sketch, both as regards the person, and the form and pressure of the time, which he describes. Every one becomes Cato, Brutus, Hampden, or Cornelia mater Gracchorum—in a revolution.

Plays of any other description than the Cato-kind they said were not wanted; more particularly in the beginning of a Commonwealth. They were besides immoral, anti-Christian, irreligious. Of all superstitions, the most revolting is that which, guided by fanaticism, proclaims a Clapham crusade against those efforts of genius by which the better sensibilities of our nature are improved. A stage properly directed is a school of morals, which appeals at once to the eye and to the ear; and through both, directs the heart. "Where is every feeling more roused in favour of virtue than at a good play? where is goodness so feelingly, so enthusiastically learnt? what so solemn as to see the excellent passions of the human

heart called forth by a great actor, animated by a great poet. To hear Siddons repeat what Shakspeare wrote—to behold the child, and his mother, the noble, and the poor artisan, the monarch, and his subject, all ages, and all ranks, convulsed with one common passion, wrung with one common anguish, and with loud sobs and sighs doing involuntary homage to the God that made their hearts.” But the Puritan and the “excellent Mr. Stanleys,” who “tremble at the idea of being entertained, and think no Christian safe who is not dull,” were successful; opinion was directed against the stage; and they closed it; to act, I may say, to enact, a tragedy of their own composition. The Civil War ensued. Charles the First lost his throne for want of a newspaper. Typocracy was not then the first estate of the realm.

After the Restoration the stage revived. It possessed the patronage of the court; Betterton as an actor; and female performers. I believe also the advantage of scenery. But the public taste was bad. The restored monarchy, like a ship infested with the plague, brought with it a corruption that degraded equally literature, morality, and religion. Dryden had the lead; Lea, Tate, Shadwell and Otway, Southern, &c.; all, more or less, occupied attention. The plays of Jonson, Fletcher, &c., were more frequently desired, of which the list made by Sir H. Herbert, of plays performed, may be cited as proof. Those of Shakspeare were not much acted; and when acted were much more disfigured. By Jonson, Dryden, and Milton, he was praised. Men of this class formed his audience; by the majority he was not understood. And this state of feeling existed, modified indeed, to a much later period; it was not until the reign of George the Second that the public took a strong interest in him, who made

Those flights upon the banks of Thames,
That so did take Eliza, and our James!

And if we examine the dramatic literature of each period we may be convinced of the melancholy truth

The canker-blooms have full as deep a dye,
As the perfumed tincture of the roses.

In 1709 Rowe commenced that series of critical editions of

his works which we possess; and the merit of which I shall now endeavour to ascertain. He was followed by Pope in 1725, who restored by rejecting what he disliked; and finished with so little success as to pass the latter part of his life in hostility with verbal criticism. He acted as a churchwarden who whitewashes marble to hide its defects. Theobald in 1733 did a little, and a little more than Pope. But he writes as if he had supped on dormouse pie, with a sauce of syrup of poppies. The following quotation I take from his preface, as a probable indication of its value.

Sudet multùm; frustrá que laboret.

Theobald is eminent by the *Dunciad*, not by his edition of Shakspeare. His preface is relieved by one joke, which it is proper to remind the reader is not his own. It was a contribution from Warburton; small, but very thankfully received. His mantle was picked up by Sir Thomas Hanmer, the Oxford editor, in 1744, who adopted all the innovations of Pope; adding whatever caprice dictated. Warburton appeared in 1747, who "always striving to display his own acuteness and scorn of others, deviates more than any one else from the meaning." Warburton's preface is marked with his usual incivility; his style to his reader is that of Pontius Pilate to the Jews. What I have written, I have written; and is not to be taken down. I write this in no irreverent spirit, but as an indication of his manner. He taunts Sir Thomas Hanmer "as a poor critic;" Theobald "as a poor man;" to whose distresses he alike contributed—as became him. Capell followed in 1768. Capell, called by Mathias, the patron of Shakspeare! His preface exhibits great industry and acquisitions for the restoration of the text, yet surely deserves his own title of being, "A HEAP OF LEAVES." "If the man would have come to me," said Dr. Johnson, "I would have endeavoured to endow his purpose with intelligible words." His style is remarkably involved. Sentence follows sentence at intervals of twenty or twenty-five lines to a full stop, and crushes the writer and the reader by its weight.

Ite meæ, felix quondam pecus, ite CAPELLÆ.

Shakspeare was rescued by Johnson in 1765, whose edition, with the valuable additions of Steevens and Reed, I shall consider as represented in that of Malone, in 1821. I so state it to prevent unnecessary citations of successive dates. Of these editions, Mr. Hallam says, "Johnson explained much well, but there is something magisterial in the manner wherein he dismisses each play, like a boy's exercise, that irritates the reader. His criticism is frequently judicious, but betrays no ardent admiration for Shakspeare. Malone and Steevens were two laborious commentators on the meanings of words and phrases, one dull, the other clever; the dulness was accompanied by candour and a love of truth; the cleverness by a total absence of both. Neither seem to have had a full discernment of Shakspeare's genius." The task allotted to these generations was that of pioneers appointed to remove the rubbish that choked the text; "which," says Chalmers, whose edition is in general use, "may now be thought to be fixed beyond the hope, or at least the probability, that any future discoveries will add much to its purity." Of other editions it is unnecessary to speak. Bowdler's has, from its peculiarity, (that of spreading Diana's linen over Cupid), obtained some note, though very few—notes of admiration; for of this it has been well said,—“That the epicures in Shakspeare, like the epicures in Woodcocks, will probably still continue to prefer the bird with its trail.” Of the majority the price is considerable, in particular, that of Malone; the best, as comprising all we know of the poet and of his works. And the same observation as to price applies to the edition of Johnson, Steevens, and Reed, 15 vols. 8vo., 1793; by many considered the most accurate and desirable. The criticism is too frequently marked with asperity, and the reader is perplexed by perpetual vacillations of opinion:—

————— Jam claustra rigentis
 Æoliæ percussa sonant, venturaque rauco
 Ore minatur hiems, venti transversa frementes
 Confligunt, axemque emoto cardine vellunt,
 Dum cælum sibi quisque rapit.

It resembles not unfrequently the opinions of those who

possess a particularly accurate idea of separate functional structure, but who are still devoid of an adequate perception of the beauty which deifies, and invests, the entire form. Men to whom analysis is everything, and synthesis unknown; who minutely examine the details of works of art, yet remain unsubdued, uninfluenced, by the impressive grandeur of their combined symmetrical arrangement. Philologists may explain, nay, become acknowledged authorities upon words and phrases, but their minds are rarely equal to the illustration of poetic beauty. No man, says Dr. Johnson, ever forgets his original trade. The rights of nations and of kings sink into questions of grammar when grammarians discuss them. For they are as

A very beadle to a humorous sigh;
A critick; nay, a nightwatch constable;
A domineering pedant o'er the boy,
Than whom no mortal so magnificent!

and are withal so matter of fact, that they not unfrequently remind you of the schoolmaster, who, in his sea-sick affliction, complained of Britannia that rules the waves, that she did not rule them straight. And, indeed, after all their long array of volumes, confused army of notes; their vanguard of prolegomena, and heavy baggage of dissertation, there is much to be done; which the more comprehensive and philosophic spirit of modern poetical criticism might effect. But let us admit the first essential, a correct text, as supplied; the labour of preceding editors, like that of the pickaxe and shovel, as having removed the rubbish by which his works were obscured; and which were before their period

Deformed, unfinished, sent before their time
Into this breathing world; scarce half made-up.

Our attention should now be turned to their examination; exclusively with regard to the understanding, the appreciation, the correct developement of his mind; in whatever form embodied, by whatever passion shadowed; with whatever high resolve connected, or by whatever sweet fancy beguiled. Be it in Hamlet, Othello, or Lear; wherever it is objectively or subjectively seen. Let us, in fact, possess an "Æsthetic" edition of his works.

That my object may more clearly be understood, I will venture, but with great diffidence, to explain in what sense I have used that term. Every one accustomed to examine the impressions produced upon his mind, through the medium of the eye or the ear, must have become gradually conscious of a perception of Beauty as existing either in Nature or Art, which becomes accurate according to the rules by which it is exercised. *Æsthetic* criticism, from *Αισθητικος* (*vim sentiendi habens*), is that branch of philosophical inquiry the object of which is the discovery of the beautiful in nature or art ; it is the philosophy of poetry, which the German writers have raised to the rank of a separate science, and applied to the critical examination of the classics of general literature. Different rules may be applicable, according to the object considered : as, a Greek Temple ; or, a Gothic Church ; Homer, or Ariosto ; Sophocles, or Shakspeare ; the subject is the same ; the perception of the beautiful ; the excellence of each work being tested by the rules of the class to which it belongs. Of those great names who have thus particularly studied Shakspeare I may cite Herder, A. W. Schlegel, Rötcher, Tieck, Gans, Horn ; and lately, Dr. H. Ulrici of Halle, of whose extensive Commentary upon each play the “ *Edinburgh Review*,” No. 144, thus speaks :—“ This book seems to us not only one of the most solidly philosophical pieces of criticism which have issued from the Teutonic school, but is in its own absolute merits an unusually valuable contribution to the Literature of Shakspeare.” That this criticism by Dr. Ulrici may be more fully understood, and as representing *a class of writers*, I have attempted the following translation of his commentary upon *Macbeth*, “ as the greatest effort of Shakspeare’s genius, the most sublime and impressive drama the world has ever beheld.” I am sensible, to use the words of old translators, that it may be said to be “ done out of German into English ;” but I must be allowed to add, “ by an Impartial Hand ;” for I have strictly endeavoured to give the meaning, in a manner suited to our language, though without pretence to style.

MACBETH.

Thus, as in *Romeo and Juliet*, *Othello* and *Lear*, Shakspeare delineates the divine power of Love in its various modifications; so in these three tragedies, *Macbeth*, &c., he especially exhibits the sphere of Feeling, Sentiment, Passion and Affection. The next point of view from whence he surveys, or glances over History and Life (always within the prescribed limits of Tragedy), follows therefore in a simple and natural manner, being as it were the patriarchal stadium, the youthful period of Humanity, in which the destiny of Man appears in direct dependance upon his own Constitution, upon the controlling force of his condition and wants, in which the first germs of social institutions are seen, when

Relations dear, and all the Charities
Of Father, Son and Brother, first were known.

It is not Will resolute and unyielding, it is not Thought in its conscious activity; but Impulse, Sensibility, Passion, instant as they exist in Nature, that here regulate the action, and constitute the immediate object of the Drama. The governing principle, historically considered, appears centred in the moral or immoral tendency of the feelings and affections. Hence design, consideration and reflection, are either entirely excluded, or appear but as subordinate motives of the tragic dénouement. For they influence less the characters of the principal dramatis personæ, upon whom the force and import of the tragedy is concentrated, than the activity of the secondary personages grouped around them, either in co-operating or opposed relation. In *Macbeth* the poet takes another point of view.

Here it is that WILL, in its absolute determination, the MANLY ACT, with the deep concealed springs of its origin, and the cautious progress of their developement, which unfold themselves, as the chief source from whence the dramatic incident flows. Poetry abandons, therefore, the first natural, simple, and original condition; it enters into the more complicated, a further step in social order; the relative condition of men associated as "Political States," of which the basis, next to the law and the moral of the external world, is that where no longer the quickly excited susceptibility and passion of youth governs; but that of which the calm determination of manly will becomes the controlling power. It is this second stage of social institutions, which constitute the poet's point of view; in order to sketch his tragic poetic picture from the History of Man, it is the grand and sublime representation of the fall and destruction of a manly, heroic, and energetic WILL. This consequent assumed particular modification of the general tragic view of the world, is therefore (similarly as in the first three tragedies) still more definitely bounded; and particularly fixed by the immediate individuality and relative

affinities of the principal dramatis personæ; as well as by the peculiar features of the time and of the nation, to which the entire representation belongs. The tragedy commences with consummate art; by the shadowy appearance of three witches, in the illusion of the introductory scene, who, after a mysterious allusion as to what they design in regard to Macbeth, melt

As breath unto the wind.

This commencement, and in general the introduction of the witches, has been condemned; first, as the rubbish of an unworthy superstition; secondly, as unpoetic, and as opposed to the proper definition of Tragedy. The first reproach is the property of the school of shallow Rationalism; an epidemic disease of instructing the people through the medium of the *REAL*, now happily overcome: the second is senseless; and is founded partly on erroneous ideas of the nature of tragic composition in general, and partly upon a superficial knowledge of this drama in particular. If it be the *sublime energy of the will, and of the deed*, in which the power of the poet manifests itself—if it be really that, then so is this very opening scene and the introduction of the witches the better calculated to place from the first in the clearest light this as the foundation upon which the entire tragic action of the drama is to be constructed. By the fall of man, and the universal sinfulness of the human race, the power both to will and to do is in man's nature infirm. Action and will are strong unto evil, weak unto good, so long as man admits not his fallen state; neither repents, atones, nor becomes a participator in the Divine Grace. But not only is the mind of man now naturally given up to evil, but inasmuch as he is the head, the organic centre and summit of the whole earthly creation,

———— as induced

With sanctity of reason:

so have also the other natural powers in immediate and essential connection; and standing to him in the organic relation of causality and mutual influence progressed in the same path—seductive and beguiling, the evil which has taken root, meets him again in the powers and elements of Nature. On account of the necessary, though obscure and mysterious connection, between this world and the next, a *possible* influence must also be conceded unto the spirits of the other world, upon the minds of those yet limited to the narrow confines of this earthly existence. Therein is found the deep meaning of the Christian doctrine of Devils, Demons, and Evil Spirits. This doctrine, with its other bright side—*viz.*, the doctrine of direct Divine assistance and grace, express together far more energetically and significantly the intimate and organic connection between the temporal and spiritual world than the medley-mixture so popular in our days, in which Phi-

losophy plunges both worlds, but only to have Heaven upon Earth ; and not Earth in Heaven.

This doctrine, which about the end of the fifteenth century, (the period of the trials for witchcraft,) had become—entirely contrary to its own spiritual character—a matter of judicial investigation; and had besides acquired an external practical importance in the world, has Shakspeare here employed, not simply as a mere poetic instrument, but because he admitted the existence and supernatural influence of witches as a truth. His witches are anomalies, beings between men and spirits; partly the progeny of spiritual evil existing in creation, partly of the debased and corrupted spirit of man, they are the echo of the evil which, in the spiritual world and in nature, corresponds with the existence of guilt in the heart of man, which animates, developes, and gives it determination and action. When, through their appearance, the general point of view, that upon which the drama is based—*viz.*, the all-pervading and investing sinfulness of human nature, viewed more particularly with regard to the freedom and energetic power of *WILL* and *ACTION* in man is shadowed forth; the announcers of Macbeth's glory and valour enter; and the victorious laurel-crowned hero, even before he himself appears, is imaged to our minds. But this heroism, this heroic strength of *WILL* and energy, carries with it the poisonous germ of its own self-destruction. Through the prophecies of the witches, the ambitious thoughts, yet slumbering in the mind of Macbeth, are awakened. Thought gives birth to the fugitive wish; wish becomes desire; desire, determination; and, aided by the exciting councils of his haughty, overbearing, and equally energetic wife—favoured, too, by circumstance and opportunity, which here alike conjoined to urge the inward promptings of his soul; he yields to the deep-laid temptation of the criminal deed, and “it is done.” Every gradation in the progress of guilt, from the first start of the evil thought, to the last conscience-stricken moment of its completion, is marked and developed with the most intimate knowledge of the workings of the mind and heart. The fearful voice,

Macbeth, has murdered sleep,

which paralyses the soul of the murderer upon the fulfilment of the deed, by degrees fades from his recollection. But once committed, immediately all impressions of horror or of shame are cast aside. The firstlings of his heart become the firstlings of his hand. Irresistibly with giant steps *SIN* expands around him; Malcolm and Donalbain are slanderously accused of parricide, from fear and envy, because, prophet-like,

They hailed him father to a line of kings;

Banquo is murdered, and Macduff's wife and children; indeed, all who appear to compromise his state or safety, fall a sacrifice to the in-

citements of his rage or suspicion. By an activity equally restless as remorseless, which heaps crime upon crime, Macbeth endeavours to lull the anguish of his perturbed conscience; his soul convulsively grasps the temporal good, purchased at the price of its eternal salvation; and from the world-admired hero is evolved the character of the universally detested tyrant. For,

Das ist der Fluch der bösen That, das sie
Fortzeugend immer Böses muss gebären.

“ Things bad begun, make strong themselves by ILL.”

The high heroic spirit, which was his gift for purposes of honour and of honourable ambition, even in evil verifies its external power; but its internal, its true support and encouragement, is destroyed; the guilt into which Macbeth and his wife have plunged is at last its own avenger, on the one hand by the frightful intellectual mania which seizes the less active mind of Lady Macbeth, already borne down by the great proportion of the guilt, and on the other by the blind confidence which Macbeth puts in the deceitful, yet encouraging prophecies of the WEIRD SISTERS. But these, even here, by no means appear simply as external agents towards man. Their encouraging promises represent the treacherous self-deceit which nestles itself in the soul of the criminal, and by glozing hopes and deceitful illusions uphold and fix his courage, until at last delusion is destruction. The real criminal, that of himself alone, *wills*, and through this passion gives action, fame, is in his nature recluse. Hence on one side stand, in solitary grandeur, Macbeth and his wife, and upon the other the nobles of the kingdom, State and People, Humanity. The progress of the action rests, therefore, on one hand only in part upon this necessary organic increasing separation of the criminal from God and the whole world, and on the other, upon the equally fearful climax to which his guilt, from moment to moment, from act to act, increased and magnified, is hurried on by its inward necessity, until it reaches its naturally prescribed end—punishment and destruction. On that account, therefore, the Scottish nobles, Macduff, Lennox, Ross, Menteith, Angus, and Caithness, and their chief, Banquo, become necessary characters as representatives of the people, and their conduct also, their wavering at first, then gradual abandonment of Macbeth, is fully warranted through the primary idea of the entire drama. Malcolm and Donalbain are comparatively the necessary representatives of the kingly power (and thereby of the *objective* power of law and morality), from whom alone is to be expected the restoration of order, and who for that purpose must be saved from the destruction which swoops around. In the Organic Unity, the Inward Necessity with which the action of the drama, from the primary idea, from the characters, and from their conceded relative circumstances, thus evolves itself, the beauty and

perfection of the tragedy consists ; and this is displayed with increased power as it advances. For as the general guilt of the human race is from the first defined as the basis of the drama, so here does the power of guilt attain the utmost height of its bad eminence, and displays itself, therefore, objectively, in the civil commotion and complete anarchy of the state, and subjectively, in the madness of Lady Macbeth, and in those fatal delusions which, tantamount to that affliction, master the mind of Macbeth, and hurry him to destruction by despair.

The deterring, terrible, and consequently unpoetical effect produced by, or existing in, the description of such states of mind is, therefore, as in *Lear*, not merely psychologically correct, but also æsthetically justified, as flowing from the primary idea conveyed by the drama. But although thus the fruit of evil is its own destruction, so there also can true help and redress alone be found where only it can be securely sought, in its origin and elemental source—the Love and Mercy of God. This is represented in the person of the religious and morally disposed King of England, whose power, widely exercised for the purposes of good, is now claimed as the effectual means of saving a neighbouring kingdom from destruction.

With this assistance, and the agency of Siward, Malcolm and Donalbain are enabled to punish the tyrant, and to restore the legitimate government and former immunities of the kingdom. But it may be said, What of consoling, what of elevating does the drama present or possess? Where exists the inward necessity for the destruction of so many unconnected with the criminal, unassociated with his crimes? I answer but with reference to the last point. That it must be conceded to the poet, who cannot represent the history of the world in its expanse, but only as concentrated in a section, to create and to exhibit secondary characters, and as such to use them ; that is to say, he must be allowed to introduce the fate of those characters, not conceived as independently existing, but only as objects suffering from the actions of others, objectively, upon the stage ; and regarding the subjective basis, whose source must be the light and shade of particular character, the active and moral powers of man, he must be allowed to convey it incidentally, or in a manner merely allusive to the mind.

Of this poetic license Shakspeare adduces sufficient proof ; thus—

Destruction overwhelms the merciful Duncan, but not entirely unprovoked. This the many insurrections against his government, which Macbeth has just subdued, attest. The accusation of parricide haunts the footsteps of his sons, the consequence of their prudent, yet ignoble flight. Banquo mirrors himself in the delusive glass of his promised future greatness, and thus self-satisfied, becomes his own destroyer. Macduff's wife and children suffer for the guilt of their father, who, mindful but of himself, forgetting a father's duty, abandons them. Their death gives energy to his mind ; but even this is the consequence of the cruelty of his wife, and her loveless persecution of his errors.

Lastly, to the entire kingdom cleaves the guilt of a shameless subservient spirit, a self-satisfied cowardice, which bows them as willing slaves before the throne of an usurper, and yields to his power the right of the legitimate regal successor

He who bows to crime, perishes by the power that he serves.

Here, too, as in general, predominates that inward necessity, the threads of which, the more secretly they intersect the drama, so the more irresistibly are we seized and held captive by its power.

Nor is the primary idea of the drama merely reflected in the character of Macbeth and his wife, it is seen throughout in their deeds and fortunes; in manifold shadows of the same guilt of *WILL* and *DEED*, through all the secondary characters, either single or combined, and in all, however modified, receives its retribution.

The first question may be in part similarly answered. The effect of the tragedy not being solely centred in the history or fate of Macbeth, it is in a manner divided, or susceptible of a varied consideration.

The overthrow of Macbeth leaves upon our minds the crushing impression of the utter ruin of human grandeur; it possesses, indeed, nothing to console, nothing to elevate, but carries in itself only the pain of punishment and death.

Yet an impression at once consoling and elevating is indirectly derived; the purifying element lies upon the second scale, which vibrates in close relation and alternation with the first; and though by this division it may lose in energy and expression, the effect is rather modified, than deficient. For the evil which the crimes of Macbeth entail on all those whose fate is interwoven with the action of the drama, becomes the atonement of their own. Their minds are purified; their virtuous feelings awakened; their resolution strengthened; till at last they arise, powerful and united, to break the fetters of that abject yoke of slavery to which they had so meanly or obediently submitted. And in this enmity to itself, this self-opposed action that evil here evinces, is proclaimed in pure and enlightened characters the consoling assurance that to virtue only belongs the power of the victor, and of its duration.

Finally, a remark upon the character of Malcolm. In conformity with the leading proposition of the drama, which conceives the energy of *WILL* and *DEED* as its historical basis, and to shew those qualities in their nothingness and final ruin, when assisting or encouraging the abettors of ill—in conformity with this, the action of the drama strides forward with amazing rapidity. All is action, deed follows deed, event rushes upon event. The dread spirits of evil which hover and brood like darkness over all, seem to have suspended the natural course of time. Crime which rushes upon crime can, by its laws of irresistible sequence, alone press on with such rapidity; evil alone can so quickly germinate and flourish in the fulness of exotic growth.

Time is requisite for the production of good. A good act requires premeditation, attentive consideration, and a calm and self-collected mind. It should seem the poet wished to impress this, to bring it home to our own minds, by the contrast of the calm, deliberative, and wary conduct of Malcolm, to the stormy wildness and rushing activity of Macbeth. How judiciously Shakspeare thus delineates the two main forms, in which WILL historically manifests itself, in all their minute intersections, scarcely requires remark. On the one hand, RAPID DEED, which follows with flashing quickness on RESOLVE, and, like an hostile surprise, attains its end at once by confusion and dismay. On the other, the cautious resolute mind that considers all, and as necessity requires, provides; availing itself even of minor causes to effect the great end, which makes even the accessory of Birnam Wood not merely accidental, which precedes all action, and guides it with slow, but certain progression, to success. Externally also it is sufficiently developed by the oppression of the nation under the tyranny of Macbeth, and civil war, the consequence of his crime.

How Sin, the latent worm which blights in their luxuriance the most beautiful flowers of human nature, maintains its power, and pervades the whole extent of earthly existence, and not only seizes and crushes its victim, but spreads destruction in his path, cannot be more impressively or pregnantly expressed.

Nor less, how that inimical and wasting power of evil is overcome, and virtue becomes the saviour and conqueror of the world, through the eternal justice and pervading love of a merciful and all-seeing God.

Macbeth is the tragedy which manifests and proves not only the Christian mind, but the active spirit of Christianity, with which Shakspeare walked with Nature, and surveyed the history of the world.

Having thus given a slight and imperfect sketch of the manner in which Dr. Ulrici has studied, and unfolded, the poetical point of view in every play, and analysed the characters which give harmony and colouring to all, I shall notice a few other works of the same school, and directed towards the same end—*viz.*, the right perception of the beautiful in Shakspeare.

1st. Abhandlungen zur Philosophie der Kunst.

Das Verhältniss der Philosophie der Kunst und der Kritik
zum einzelnen Kunstwerke.

König Lear von Shakspeare.

Von Dr. Heinrich Theodor Röscher, 8vo. 1837.

This, I believe, may be classed as more particularly belonging to *Ethical* Æsthetic, or the illustration of that which constitutes the excellence of a work of art, combined with the elucidation of the moral it conveys. Every character undergoes the most minute analysis, yet not after the manner of that tedious system by which a poet is microscopically killed, flea-bitten, as it were, to death, but with that cultivated appreciation of *his mind*, by which *its beauties* become more clearly reflected, and—

All its hues,
From the rich sun-set to the rising star
Their magical variety diffuse.

2nd. Dramaturgische Blätter von Ludwig Tieck. 2 vols. 18mo. 1826.

This contains criticisms upon Shakspeare's *Lear*, *Hamlet*, &c., but is chiefly devoted to remarks upon those eminent tragedians who, by the energy and graceful feeling of their own genius, have taught many, debarred from his works, to know and to look through with a fit mind, that greater genius who has been their word, their wisdom, and effectual might.

3rd. Gans Professor, *Vermischte Schriften* jurist: historisch: Staatwiss: und Æsthetischen Inhalts, 2 vols. 12mo. 1834.

A work containing, among various literary papers, a critical article, entitled “*Der Hamlet des Ducis und der des Shakspeare*,” in which the character of *Hamlet* is carefully considered.

But it is said foreign critics do not understand Shakspeare. This opinion had probably its origin in the following excellent criticism of George the Third:—The Germans translate Shakspeare! why we do not understand him ourselves, how should foreigners? The queen replied, that she thought *Eichenberg* had rendered the soliloquies very exactly. Aye, answered the king, that is because, in those serious speeches, there are none of those puns, quibbles, and peculiar idioms of Shakspeare and his times, for which there are no equivalents in other languages. Whatever its origin, it is an opinion in general most easily urged, and readily believed, by all those who have a pious horror of French translators and

Voltaire, and whose minds are haunted with a blank fear that the "myriad-minded" may be crushed by the myriad-unminded censors of his school. But let the German critics be for ever separated, they bring all that mind can offer in reverence to mind : attention, respect, ability, knowledge. They enjoy beauty with intellectual feeling ; and sensible to faults, consider them rather as spots on the sun, seen not because of their extreme darkness, but rather of the intense brightness, of the orb they disfigure. They are extremely opposed to many critics of whom an author might say they exist ;—

Come dividiendo

Los contrarios accidentes

De nieve y fuego ; ha partido

En mi el fuego, en ti la nieve :

and who stand between us and Shakspeare, and shew for pretended spots upon his disk, only the shadows of their own opacity.

Even though we do not admit their critical peculiarities—a tendency to establish a stated theory, in sole relation to which an author is to be considered ; yet should we limit criticism to the dull circle of our own ? proclaim a despotism, and not a tolerance, and forbid the worship of intellect, unless in accordance with our ritual, and the articles of some particular Shakspeare creed ? I must be permitted, in all humility to the opinions of others, to hope at least we shall gain more worshippers, more pilgrims to his genius by allowing—

Che qui ciascun secondo il suo amore

Giudichi ;—in quanto a me son—buon cattolico

Ma l'allegro amo piu che il melancolico.

We have been already censured for exhibiting rather the littleness of sectarian prejudice, than the greatness of a genuine Catholic liberality. This opinion I should venture to express, but that I can submit the following from Coleridge's "Remains" as its justification :—"Every critic who has or has not made a collection of black-letter books—in itself a useful and respectable amusement—puts on the seven-league boots of self-opinion, and strides at once from a *mere illustrator* unto a supreme judge, and blind and deaf, fills his three-ounce phial

at the waters of Niagara, and determines *positively* the greatness of the cataract to be neither more nor less than his three-ounce phial has been able to receive."

Now this school of *positive* criticism, which permits of no admiration or appreciation of Shakspeare but that which is derived from its own method of teaching, is not solely the result of a correct perception of his beauties. Admiration of an author does not always imply sensibility to merit, but has its source not unfrequently in the splendour which he sheds upon the circle of our pursuits. And this is more particularly the case with Shakspeare, from the universality of his mind: for to one he is dear, as black letter; to another, as a quarry for obsolete words; to a third, as the armoury for political quotations; and to a fourth, as the delightful medium for conveying the accumulated stores of literary and miscellaneous intelligence to the world. Thus admiration is rather the result of a reflex action of the mind; we retrograde from other pursuits to him by whom they have been hallowed, and judge more by an indirect external cause than from an innate direct sensibility, and perception of beauty, as an essentiality in his works.

Every popular author is also surrounded by clouds of witnesses all most anxious to impress upon the public mind their quick perception, and just appreciation of merit; provided always—they are allowed to be the critics. Timid almost to delicacy in the expression of opinion when an author's popularity is doubtful, let but a good report be heard, proclaimed, by the minor canons of coterie opinion, and they stun every sense but common sense, by their vulgar panegyrics and loud exclamations in his behalf. Men too inclined to slight poetry, perhaps from some innate conviction that originally their minds were inclined to *prose*, who rise in discourse to the elevation of Lindley Murray, and express wisdom in the dignity and gnomie form of copy-book slips, are still apt to exact as much *positive control* over opinion as though they really thought themselves moved by the spirit of Aristotle, or that they walked the circle of human knowledge with the grandeur of Lord Bacon.

To these may be added a class (to whom only as a class

I allude)—*viz.*, of literary characters; by which term I do not mean any persons approaching even unto the knowledge of a Benedictine, or of those, whose names are to your ears familiar as household words; but gentlemen of good education, and of no great natural parts, of troublesome memories, and uncertain habits of thinking; who have ever some foggy idea of excellence in an author, and very vague methods of definition, but who, nevertheless, are very positive that Shakspeare can be but Shakspeare, when viewed as they view him, as Gulliver viewed a certain portion of mankind—the telescope reversed—in little. Moreover, too frequently, and during all periods of literary history, instead of considering every subject in its absolute, and relative point of view—instead of uniting it as a species of wisdom, with one of the greatest virtues:—toleration, criticism has been a dogmatism, or a mask for party spleen; men have enounced opinions in the style of Chinese edicts, or as if the author, whose fame through the long lapse of ages they considered were yet of the earth, subject to their passions, or influenced by the shadows they pursue. As regards Shakspeare, the cause of this is readily seen. The universality of his mind, and the consequent applicability of his writings to all sorts and conditions of men, have produced naturally all sorts and conditions of opinion, much amiable weakness, and occasional amusement, of which latter the following may not prove unacceptable examples.

Mr. ———, a gentleman well known in the professional and literary circles of London, a great admirer of Shakspeare, having somewhat enthusiastically stated, in a discussion upon his merits, “that there was no subject to which attention could be directed that he had not clearly illustrated or defined,”—was asked in reply, “Where, and in what manner, he had mentioned the TREAD-MILL?” There was a pause, a slight pressure of the forehead, a gentle compression of the lips, a perplexed look; but it was only for a moment: all doubt was hushed, all cavilling silenced, as with the tone of a victor, he quoted the following:—

——— “DOWN, THOU CLIMBING SORROW,
Thy element 's below !”

LEAR, *Act ii., Scene 4.*

And the author of "*Fallacies of the Faculty*," or, as some one called it, "Of *one* of the Faculty," admitting a partiality for Shakspeare, Milton, and Samuel Johnson, no doubt very undesignedly in opposition to the late William Cobbett's rather more noted antipathy to Shakspeare, Milton, and, I am ashamed to add, Potatoes! introduces the first in the following manner to his pupils:—

"Who among you, for example, could suppose it possible to

Fetter strong madness with a *silken thread*,
Cure ache with air, and agony with words.

Had these suggestions come from the pen of any other poet but Shakspeare you might be readily pardoned for supposing them the mere effusions of a heated fancy; but, Gentlemen, in these very lines we have only a fresh illustration of the *perfect acquaintance* of this wonderful writer with every one of the subjects which he touched."

Now this seems to favour an opinion of his qualifications as governor of some spacious and rural retreat in the neighbourhood of —, where the name of *Warburton* may still be blended with his own, and which, with a lively indifference to their personal convenience, or opinions as to comfort, the inventive public, that

For a tricky word
Defies the matter;

(and seems inclined to use its faculties only for the benefit of the faculty, or the curious in madhouses,) has of late destined to be the calm and sedate receptacle for every modern writer convicted of great original ability, rapid and various powers of observation and description, rich natural wit, and sensibility to the sufferings of his fellow-men.

Yet Dr. Dickson has the high authority of A. W. Schlegel and Sir H. Halford for his opinion; and I introduce the quotation rather to shew the tendency of estimating Shakspeare from a point of view peculiar to ourselves, than to doubt the accuracy of the deduction.

The truth is, the grasp of Shakspeare's extraordinary intellect seized and expressed with certainty the knowledge which

hundreds acquire by a long process of observation and reflection. No man ever possessed, such a distinguishing capability of subduing his nature to what it worked in; from DOGBERRY to MACBETH, it is ever Shakspeare, and always Nature. True, his characters may not always act in accordance with dramatic rules; but they are consistent with our experience of life, and in relation to general laws of human nature.

We are not, as in modern plays, required to pay the tax of a wearisome patience in listening to long recitations, comprising the biography, both in little and full, of some character or circumstance essential to the due comprehension of the plot; for "the characters appear neither to do nor to say anything on account of the spectator, by means of the exhibition itself, and without any subsidiary explanation, we observe their secret springs of action," and foretell the progress of the drama. And whatever their sphere, he is equal to the delineation. The King and the Beggar, the Fairy and the Brute, Titania or Caliban, are all endowed with appropriate speech and action by the same master-spirit. His Kings breathe royalty, and Slender the gentleman of Songs and Sonnets, and of a fanciless way of thinking, is equally felt to be the adequate representative of his tribe. Then the Passions:—Rage with him is not rant; Jealousy, the low-bred passion of a paltry mind, excited by the miserable susceptibility of an inane vanity, or captious suspicion of an ill-regulated heart,

Which lies like a hedge-hog rolled up the wrong way,
Tormenting itself with its prickles—

no; it is rather the high feeling of a most constant, loving, noble nature, sudden and quick in quarrel, from an acute sensibility of tarnished reputation, withering ingratitude, and of a name dishonoured by connection with the vile. Nor is Love the modern frothy effluvia of a diseased imagination, expanded by barren declamation, and heightened by clap-trap position, but it is virtuous, and refined, such as nature prompts, and reason sanctions: so that as regards the characters,

Our ears
Take pleasure in their pain, and eyes in tears,
Both smile and weep.

Can any man read Macbeth, or rather any mind, and not feel paralyzed by the reflection that such a character may be an historic truth, an extract from the book of Nature? For Shakspeare is the master of reality, he shews us with a truth that is painful, all the thoughts and aspirations of that fallen spirit—Man. He strikes the jarring chords in the harp of nature; but not deprived of any portion of his human sympathies, by the elevation to which he was raised, he produces an effect far more deep and abiding than the whole body of petulant splenetics,

Who from their closets rail at human kind,

and are known generally by the name of satiric poets. He did not, indeed, create the stage, but he created the Romantic Drama; he found the point where the grand, the natural, and the true, intersect each other; and to attain that point is the perfection of the Dramatic Art.

As the storm which rushes in its fury, the unclouded sky, the bright clouds which flit across its azure, like holy thoughts over the ocean of truth, the light which bathes the world in splendour, the one bright star which watcheth, and every variety of beauty from combination of light and shade, are all reflected in a lake's expanse; so were the glory of heaven, the darkening shadows of earth, the intellectual spirit and knowledge of man, all alike reflected in the graceful imagery and graphic power of his mind.

He can

Find all our atoms, from a point t' a span;
Our closest creeks and corners he can trace,
Each line as it were graphic in the face.

For his soul walked abroad in its majesty unto Nature, and imbibed inspiration from her works.

It is idle to say, that Shakspeare has in general evinced a particular observance of strict Dramatic rules. He mastered, rather than obeyed them. He had the religion, but not the superstition, of a great artist. Imagination incessantly presented to his mind a series of images, or pictures, of the Affections, Feelings, Passions; these he coloured by a grasping intuition, which realized and embodied their varied expression.

He breathed into his characters the breath of Truth and Life, gave to each its appropriate form, and struck their world into existence by the creating energy of Thought.

Arte laboratum nulla : simulaverat artem
Ingenio Natura suo :

I now proceed to consider the means we possess for obtaining a good critical edition of his works. I shall class the authors as follows :—Æsthetic, and Illustrative.

ÆSTHETIC.

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|-----------------|---|--|
| <i>Foreign.</i> | { | Lessing Hamburgische Dramaturgie. Herder Blättern von Deutscher Art und Kunst; Goethe, in Wilhelm Meister; Tieck Poetisches Journal; A. W. Schlegel, Lectures on Dramatic Literature; Ulrici Shakspeare's Dramatische Kunst; Rötischer, König Lear; Gans, Vermischte Schriften; Horn Shakspeare erläutert, &c. |
| <i>English.</i> | { | Of these I name only the principal. The Criticisms of Bishop Hurd, Lord Kaimes, Mr. Coleridge, Mr. Hallam, and much of the high character of the Essays in the Quarterly and Edinburgh Reviews—Essays by Lamb, Hazlitt, Jameson, &c. |

ILLUSTRATIVE.

The Historical Commentaries of the Right Hon. Thomas Peregrine Courtenay, a work which will gain more friends the more it is consulted, being calculated to give the reader an accurate knowledge of the personages of the drama; of various points connected with the incidents of each play; and the authorities upon which they were founded. It is a valuable contribution alike to historical fact, and to legendary illustration; and, after the opinions of the Schlegels upon the accuracy of the Historical Plays, that point had become a very proper subject for critical investigation.

The works of Mr. Collier, not only as regards the biography of the poet, but by reason of his great accessions to Shakspeare Literature in his "Annals of the Stage," and the "New Facts," &c. of his generally admitted authority upon the Early Drama; in short, whatever great acquirements in this department can add to historical and literary illustration.

SUBSIDIARY ILLUSTRATIONS.

By Engravings of Costume ; Portraits and strictly Descriptive Scenes ; a copious Glossary, arranged alphabetically, compiled from Nares, Richardson, Johnson, Steevens, Reed, Malone, &c. &c., comprising all the information now so much scattered. Illustrations of Ancient Customs ; Local Allusions ; Popular Antiquities ; and obsolete Phrases. An extensive Verbal Index and History of the Stage. The Commentary, Glossary, and Verbal Index should be published in separate volumes, at a moderate price ; thus made attainable by every possessor of the works. There are many points also, which although not of importance, yet derive interest from the talent and learning with which they have been discussed. Thus the Learning of Shakspeare, the Historical, and the Autograph Questions ; the Chronology of the Plays ; and the sources from whence they were drawn. What we require, however, is not the discussion ; but the results of discussion. Unfortunately because one man considers a minor point in a little manner, we are too apt to deride all consideration of minor points. This is very natural, and—very hasty. Thus I have heard the Autograph Question described as an “Inquiry into the manner in which Shakspeare spelt *pea*,” which description may be correct ; but those who so consider it, forget that it is also the exact question of right or wrong ; which even upon minute points has a moral claim upon our attention, and a literary interest derived both from its connection with the poet, and those who discuss the subject. There is a very delightful medium between the adoration of Boswell and his bended knees, and the You-shan’t-think-but-as-I-let-you-style of Shakspeare’s keeper, Warburton ; and it has been found.

With respect to the historical question, it may appear ludicrous that I should venture to doubt the authority of Coleridge ; yet I confess that as regards this historical question and John Duke of Marlborough, it strikes me his confession in that respect has been misunderstood, *or* overstated. Coleridge writes :—“ It certainly seems that Shakspeare’s historic

dramas produced a very deep effect on the mind of the English people, in earlier time particularly, as appears from Bishop Corbett." "Marlborough, we know (he does not cite his authority) was not ashamed to confess that his principal acquaintance with English history was derived from them." Now what are the facts?—Coxe, who has written the character of Marlborough very much in the style of a country epitaph, "dutiful Son," "tender Husband," "affectionate Father," "indulgent Master," &c. admits "he was little favoured by education or science;" and Lord Chesterfield describes him as "remarquablement ignorant, n'ayant jamais su bien écrire, ni même lire correctement en Anglais;" but no one can doubt his possession of powerful natural abilities; and I would venture to submit, that his confession was simply tantamount to this:—"My education was so neglected, that my principal acquaintance with English history was derived from Shakspeare's plays!" rather than at any time, certainly in his time, that the influence of the poet was so great as to secure him the authority of an historian, or to induce a mind like Marlborough's to mistake to that extent. Old names and achievements have ever been made popular through Shakspeare, and the enchasing is frequently richer than the stone it incloses. History is the memory of thought and act; the Poet concentrates what the Historian disposes. Marlborough's confession of *information* derived from such a source is natural and pleasing; but much beyond this, it rather indicates a somewhat pastoral simplicity of mind. Undue praise of an author, however, is not unfrequently bestowed, because in the contemplation of another's excellence we reflect our own, and many a critic in this sense has met with the fate of Narcissus; Censure, on the contrary, is indulged as it betokens superiority and relieves our minds by contrast. But an honest judgment should be formed upon reflection, reason, and comparison, not by the sole predominant influence of our "organ of veneration," which precludes inquiry; makes truth subservient to the occasion; mistakes the bigotry of feeling for the admiration of the mind; and degrades now, as it desecrated at former periods by its excess, many a literary idol, that originally it had put forth with the symbols of intellectual worship.

May I be permitted also to add one question as to his quibbles—"the fatal Cleopatra, for which he lost the world, and was content to lose it." Allow the custom of the age; admit the propensity of the writer. But are they *all his own*? Are none the interpolations of the actors? Warburton, in Henry IV. Part 2, has a note upon their custom in this respect, and in the direction to the players Hamlet says, "And let those who play your Clowns *speak no more than is set down for them*," &c. &c. Take, for instance, Macbeth, Scene iii., Act 2. Can that *Porter* be Shakspeare's? Coleridge pledged himself to prove this scene an interpolation. Can it have slipped in from some other play?

And may we not hope that the Shakspeare Society will add much to knowledge, and increase the reverence, the proud and affectionate reverence, with which Shakspeare is regarded, and without which, at least, "an Englishman is disqualified for the office of illustrator or critic." I know that to antiquarian research, as antiquarian research alone, objections may be urged; but blended with high intellectual qualities, a knowledge of the human heart, and correct powers of perceiving and fixing the point of view in which a dramatic poet should be regarded—all which is to be hoped for; not from one mind, but by the contributions and fusion of many—I cannot but think that so blended, the object of a truly critical, well-illustrated edition, calculated to impress us with an *understanding* knowledge of Shakspeare, would finally be obtained. We must not be deterred, on the one hand, from Æsthetic criticism, from the supposition that it is theoretic mysticism, nor from antiquarian research from fear of being marked as members of "*The Roddist Club*." Recollecting in the one instance, we do much if we elicit one critical truth; and in the other, that if we entirely spare the *Rodd* we may possibly spoil the child. As to translations from the German, all must be aware of the admirable manner in which this might be done. A late work has fully proved this, and the justice also of that critical opinion which has declared "That in the republic of letters there is really now no distinction of RANKS." But no man should undertake to edit Shakspeare who is the disciple

of a particular teacher, the mere reflector of the thoughts of a circle. A true Shakspeare critic should possess universality of mind; he should throw aside predilections and blind habits; he should endeavour to recognize, and display, the natural and grand in his author; to illustrate his mind by the highest intellectual criticism; by the tribute of the World to his genius; not by the despotism of some particular opinion, or the dogmas of any peculiar coterie. Voltaire well says, "Il faut être vrai, il faut être juste, le philosophe n'est ni Français, ni Anglais, ni Florentin; il est de tout pays. Il ne ressemble pas à la Duchesse de Marlborough qui, dans une fièvre tierce ne voulait pas prendre de quinquina parce qu'on l'appelait en Angleterre—la poudre des Jésuites."

Do but consider the state of the Drama, there is cause for exertion; of theatrical criticism; public taste, there is cause for more. Look around. Germany, France, and Italy are yearly adding to their already rich treasures of national history. Philosophy and the Fine Arts—the first, which elevates man by the education of his moral feelings; the other, which refines him by the associations of a cultivated imagination, are there alike studied, pursued with energy, honoured, and publicly rewarded. In our own country, polemics, politics, and periodicals occupy almost exclusively the talent of the day. The leaves of the last class fall around you

Thick as *leaves* in Vallombrosa.

And why is this? They allay the thirst of novelty, and are the food of excitement. Many periodicals I admit exist, which become the moral and intellectual guides of a certain portion of the people. But many more are the mere instruments of cabal for the purpose of misleading opinion. It has been well said, "The newspapers and the railroads are now solving the problem of teaching the people of England to vote like that of Athens, in one Agora." Instead of an influence formerly locally exercised, we have on all sides the opinions of masses, forced upon masses, with a power of rapid and combined exertion almost gigantic. The trifling influence that can at any time be retained over large towns,

the natural independence of citizens, increase the force of those popular currents, which occasionally bear down all the deliberative and checking safeguards of a state. But the power they possessed is one hundred-fold increased by rapid communication. A day sees principles destroyed or propagated throughout the nation:—and at such a time we patronize the worst possible literature. Is any man ignorant of the dramatic representations of the French republic! he may see them rubric on each wall, cleaned a little for the present fashion, and represented at the minors. Laffarge, Jack Sheppard, and the Red Barn are but types of an infamous class of plays and novels replete with morbid excitement, and the half-avowed patronage of crime.

Letting I cannot wait upon I would.

No man wisely neglects even the street songs of a people. A minister in the cabinet should know the opinions of the cabaret. One touch of nature makes the whole world kin. Some minor theatres may be said to touch for the evil that exists in man. Few know even the extensive sale of a certain portion of popular publications; the interest excited, the power possessed by compounds of La Mennais, Robert Owen, and the Newgate Calendar. Now I do not say all this will be corrected by a new edition of Shakspeare; that *of itself* will as little affect the growth of opinion as that of mustard and cress; as little will it reform the depravity of society, as the vice-versâ Vice for Virtue system of the Socialist; or, upon a small scale, as the really benevolent, and truly Christian beehives of Mr. Morgan. But it may excite opinion, indirectly lead to the reproduction of other authors, and gradually refine taste by increasing respect for their imperishable productions. Much good—as much evil, is accidental. Chance no less than design co-operates in the creation of opinion; and the opinion of the day is the government of the world.

It may be pleasant to suppose that Shakspeare and Milton are popular in England. But if by that word popular it is meant they are attentively read, and deeply studied, it is a question to my mind whether the morality of Mr. Jack Sheppard,

the political purity of Mr. Waddington the Bill Sticker, or the existence of a Miss Mermaid, be either a more popular fallacy, or a grosser delusion. True Shakspeare has been restored to the stage by the critical and educated taste of Mr. Macready; true he is retained there by the liberal and well-directed management of Madame Vestris; but what is this?—only that some three or four of his pieces can be borne by our all-intelligent public, and these seasoned up with all the accessories of Scenery, Music, Dress, and Processions. True also it is, that the editions of his Works now in course of publication induce us to hope they are the harbingers of a Shakspeare taste as existing in the reading public. But I feel convinced that with the majority the intellectual grandeur of Shakspeare is but a matter of faith; a thing seen not by the understanding. For as to entering into his thoughts, conceiving Hamlet, Lear, or Macbeth, it is the property of those only who have the temperament of genius, or the power to comprehend and sympathise with the criticism of intellectual minds. Tens of thousands only know him by the stage; his connection with their pursuits; or the chance accident of an occasional perusal.

In conclusion, let me again employ the eloquent language of Coleridge:—"Oh, when I think of the inexhaustible mine of virgin treasure in our Shakspeare, that I have been almost daily reading him since I was ten years old; and that at every new accession of information, after every successful exercise of meditation, I have unfailingly discovered a proportionate increase of wisdom and intuition in his works, when I know this, and know too, that by a conceivable and possible, though hardly to be expected arrangement, not all, but a large, a very large proportion of this indefinite all, might be sent into the heads and hearts—into the very souls of the mass of mankind, to whom, except by *this living comment and interpretation*, it must remain for ever a sealed volume, a deep well, without a wheel or a windlass;—*it seems to me a pardonable enthusiasm to steal away from sober likelihood, and share in so rich a feast in the fairy world of possibility.*"

For myself this has been a labour of love.

Grata laboratæ referens oblivia Vitæ.

With but few friends, and at intervals the depression of uncertain health, surrounded by books, in a situation of continuous duty, lightened, and its pleasures enhanced by the condescension of the great, both in mind and station, (more particularly of a few to whom I am peculiarly indebted, not only for much valuable information, but for those generous sensibilities which turn from the heart the bitter truth—"che dura è in povertà il pan d'altrui," and chiefly urge us to exertion, by enabling us of that exertion to forget both the necessity and cause)—it is not unnatural that so situated, I should venture to cultivate literature upon a little oatmeal, and that it should become to me a source of quiet humble joy. I send this tract into the world without hope and without fear: without hope, for I feel that it in no way adds to knowledge; but without fear, since it has no unbecoming object, and seeks but to attract increased attention, where attention will ever be most repaid—upon the *WORKS* of SHAKSPEARE.

To thee I send this written embassy
To witness duty—not to shew my wit.
Duty so great, which wit so poor as mine
May make seem bare in wanting words to shew it.

I have the honor to be,

SIR,

&c.

&c.

SPENCER HALL.

ATHENÆUM,
January 18, 1841.



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